

# NR 114 INTERPRETATION:

## How to Become a Certified Operator in the State of Wisconsin

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
Operator Certification Program  
PO Box 7921  
Madison, WI 53707-7921  
Website: <http://dnr.wi.gov> (Search keywords “Operator Certification”)

Thank you for your interest in the Operator Certification Program.

We hope the information contained in this handout is helpful to you. If you have any questions, please contact your regional coordinator (page 9).

Welcome to the Operator Certification Program, and good luck in your career.

## WHAT IS A CERTIFIED OPERATOR?

A "Certified Operator" is an individual who has met the requirements of Subchapter I-Certification of Waterworks and Wastewater Treatment Plant Operations under Chapter NR 114 and has been issued a certificate by the DNR to operate one or more of the classifications of waterworks or wastewater treatment plants.

The Operator Certification Program (Chapter NR 114 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code) was designed to ensure that waterworks and wastewater operators have adequate training to perform the necessary tasks at their facilities. Under the Operator Certification Program, the operator is required to pass one or more exams, depending on the certification they are seeking. The exam(s) which the operator should take are dependent upon the class and subclass of the treatment plant at which he/she works, or would like to work.

## HOW DO I BECOME A CERTIFIED WASTEWATER OR WATERWORKS OPERATOR?

In order to become certified, you must take an exam or exams based on the type of certification you seek. Written certification exams for Wastewater and Waterworks operators are given twice annually (May and November) at six locations across the state. Registration is required before taking a written exam. Applications for the exams are available on the operator certification website 2 ½ months prior to the exam date at <http://dnr.wi.gov> – keywords: “*Operator Certification*”, or by contacting your regional coordinator listed at the end of this document. The application must be postmarked at least 28 days prior to the scheduled exam date. Any exam applications postmarked after the due date will be RETURNED and the applicant will not be able to participate in the upcoming exam day.

Study guides, which are a valuable tool to help prepare for exams, can be downloaded at <http://dnr.wi.gov> – keywords “*Operator Certification*”, or you may contact your regional coordinator for a hard copy.

A score of 75% or higher is a passing score on each exam. Any exam which you pass will be credited to your record. You will receive notice of your exam scores by mail approximately 3-4 weeks after the exam date. The letter sent out after each exam is to notify you of the score you received and includes a list of missed objectives on the right hand side of the letter. Look up the missed objectives in your study guide for the appropriate subclass to determine what areas of the exam you got wrong. Examination papers will not be returned to you. Applicants who have failed a written exam may apply for re-examination at the next scheduled exam by requesting an application and paying exam fees.

## WASTEWATER OPERATOR

Wastewater treatment plants are assigned class codes from 1 to 4; 4 being the highest class. This plant class is based on a number of factors, including plant design flow, the number of treatment processes, permit effluent limits, and types of industries contributing wastewater.

To become a certified wastewater operator for subclasses A through J you must pass the general exam (either introductory or advanced) and at least one subclass exam (introductory or advanced).

Subclasses are also assigned to wastewater treatment plants which correspond to the processes used at the

plant. Subclasses are designated by letters A through L. WASTEWATER processes that have certification exams are:

General (Required with A-J)

- A - Primary Settling
- B - Trickling filters and rotating biological contactors
- C - Activated Sludge
- D - Stabilization ponds and aerated lagoons
- E - Disinfection
- F - Anaerobic digestion
- G - Mechanical sludge dewatering and treatment
- H - Filtration (tertiary)
- I - Phosphorus removal
- J - On-site laboratory testing

WASTEWATER subclasses K & L do not require an operator to pass a general exam. The operator only needs to pass a subclass K or L exam to become certified. Subclasses K & L are:

- K - Special - generally for treatment plants using chemical or physical treatment, or both
- L - Electroplating and metal finishing

You may take the general and subclass exams at either grade level (exam skipping). You will automatically be given credit for having passed the introductory level subclass exams if you pass the advanced level subclass exams. (Example: You wrote the Primary Settling Advanced exam and passed, you would be given credit for having passed the Primary Settling Introductory exam.

When you have passed a general and subclass exam (or K or L exam) you will become an Operator-In-Training - Grade T. In order to move above a Grade T you must have earned experience and have filled out an experience sheet and submitted the completed sheet to your regional coordinator. The region will determine whether experience credit is approved or denied and you will be notified either way. Experience forms are available on the Operator Certification forms page at <http://dnr.wi.gov> – keywords “*Operator Certification*”, or by contacting your regional coordinator.

The requirements for wastewater operator certification for each grade are:

Grade T - Pass written introductory or advanced general exam and introductory or advanced subclass exam(s).

Grades 1 & 2 - Pass written introductory or advanced general exam and introductory or advanced subclass exam(s) and have one year of subclass specific experience for Grade 1 and 2 years of experience for Grade 2.

Grades 3 & 4 - Pass written advanced general exam and advanced subclass exam(s) and have 3 years of experience for Grade 3 and 4 years of experience for Grade 4.

Subclass K (Special K) & L (Electroplating and Metal Finishing) will have one exam that covers all grade

levels. No general exam will be required for these two subclasses.

Each plant must have a designated operator in charge certified at the plant class level and in the same subclasses as the processes used at the plant.

## WATERWORKS OPERATOR

All publicly owned waterworks are required to have a certified operator and are assigned a Grade of 1. WATERWORKS subclasses which correspond to the processes used are also assigned by letters as follows:

- G - Groundwater - utilizing a groundwater source
- Z - Zeolite Softening - provides zeolite softening
- I - Iron Removal - providing iron removal by oxidation and filtration
- L - Lime Softening - providing treatment by lime-soda ash process
- S - Surface Water - utilizing a surface water source
- D - Distribution - containing a distribution system
- V - VOC - providing special treatment such as, but not limited to, air stripping, granular activated carbon or others

The requirements for waterworks operator certification for each grade are:

Grade T - Passing waterworks subclass exam(s).

Grade 1 - One year of satisfactory experience in the operation of a waterworks plant subclass(es), and passing the appropriate subclass exam(s).

Each plant must have a designated operator in charge certified in the appropriate subclasses for the processes used at the plant.

Class S waterworks facilities shall have an operator certified at Grade T or 1 on duty at all times of operation.

## CERTIFICATES

An operator is issued a certificate when he/she becomes certified. This certificate specifies the grade and subclasses for which you are certified, and also indicates the month and year that your certification will expire (3 years from issuance). All certifications expire on the first day of the month. Certificates are issued approximately four weeks after the date of the certification exam.

Fees for certification are as follows:

- Each written examination - \$25.00
- Three year renewal fee - \$45.00
- Late renewal penalty - \$25.00

### HOW DO I GET OPERATING EXPERIENCE CREDITED TO MY RECORD?

To apply for operational experience (1, 2, 3 or 4 years for wastewater, 1 year for waterworks), you should complete the Operator Certification Experience Form (Form 3400-66A) which is available on the Operator Certification forms page at <http://dnr.wi.gov> – keywords “*Operator Certification*”, or by contacting your regional coordinator. EXPERIENCE FORMS may be filled out any time of the year that you have acquired another year of experience. (Note for wastewater operators: The first year of experience is subclass specific. The second, third and fourth year are general wastewater operational experience.) Some operators take more than one year to acquire one year of experience because they don't work full time in the given processes. Any time you have acquired approximately 1,500 hours of experience in a subclass which you have not been given credit for, fill out the experience form and send it to your regional certification coordinator so they may verify your experience and credit your record. It is important to be complete and specific in describing operational tasks on the experience form. The review and approval of experience occurs in the region office (please see page 9 for your region's mailing address). Experience has a direct effect on your grade level. Without experience credit you cannot go beyond the Grade T level.

### HOW DO I RENEW MY CERTIFICATION?

The code requires that you earn continuing education credits to maintain an active certification. This continuing education requirement is designed to help you keep current on new requirements and technical innovations. Continuing education also helps you acquire additional knowledge and skills.

Your certification must be renewed every three years (refer to your certificate for the expiration date of your certification). The number of continuing education hours required varies according to type of certification and grade level:

Wastewater operators

- Grade T, 1, or 2 require 18 hours
- Grades 3 and 4 require 24 hours.

Water Supply Operators

- 18 hours
- Surface water operators, who are designated operator-in-charge, are required to have 24 hours of continuing education.

The continuing education requirements may be obtained in a number of different ways including attendance at professional organization meetings, waterworks and wastewater related courses, EPA and DNR training courses, state and national conferences (i.e. AWWA or WEF), in-house and self-study courses, and courses offered by technical schools, universities, etc. Credit for courses is determined by the following criteria:

1. Each hour spent in course learning constitutes one credit hour of continuing education credit. Breaks and lunch do not count towards hours of credit.
2. Accredited courses at technical schools or universities - 1 CEU (Continuing Educational Unit) is equal to 10 hours continuing education credit.
3. Attendance at the entire course and successful completion of the course is required to receive any credit.
4. A maximum of 6 hours health and safety related training may be used per renewal period.
5. Credits must be earned in the three year period prior to your expiration date. (i.e. July 1, 2013 is the expiration date of your certificate. Credits must be earned between July 1, 2010 and July 1, 2013 to be valid for your renewal on July 1, 2013.) Extra credits do not carry over to the next renewal period.

Most trainings and meetings will provide a continuing education slip as proof of attendance. Please be sure to fill out your name, certification number, and sign the continuing education slip. If you do not receive a continuing education credit slip from a training or meeting that you attend, then complete an **Operator Training Report Form**, available at <http://dnr.wi.gov> – keywords “*Operator Certification*”, or by contacting your regional coordinator. Mail in your Operator Training Report Form when you renew your certification.

To receive continuing education credits, you must provide the following on the Operator Training Report Form:

1. course title
2. course content (outline or pamphlet describing course)
3. course date(s)
4. number of hours attended
5. location
6. training provider and instructor name
7. proof that the course was attended (i.e. certificate of completion or sign-in sheet)

You should keep your continuing education credits and other documentation on file until it is time for you to renew your certification. Six weeks before your certification expires, you should receive a courtesy renewal letter (please notify your regional coordinator of any change in address). This letter serves as a courtesy reminder only. It is your responsibility as an operator to keep track of your certification expiration date. When you are ready to renew, mail the renewal letter, the continuing education slips, and the \$45 renewal fee to the Operator Certification Program.

If you have not accumulated the correct number of credit hours per renewal period, then the renewal packet should not be sent in until the credits have been obtained. Once you have obtained the correct number of

credits, mail in your renewal packet with the \$70 fee (\$45 renewal fee and \$25 late fee). Once your certificate expires, you have one year from the expiration date to reinstate your lapsed certification. **You are NOT considered a certified operator during this lapse of your certification.** If your certification is not renewed within that one year time period, you will need to re-take the written exams as a new operator.

## COMPARABLE CERTIFICATION (RECIPROCITY)

If you have a current Wastewater and/or Waterworks certificate from another state and are interested in applying for reciprocity to Wisconsin's Operator Certification program, you may request a reciprocity application by contacting Lisa Bushby at 608-266-0498 or [Lisa.Bushby@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Lisa.Bushby@Wisconsin.gov).

The comparable review certification fee is \$100 per certificate. After receipt of your application, please allow 1-3 months for the verification and review process.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

***Why am I still at a Grade T - I passed the exams?*** Grade levels are computed as a combination of passed exams and credited experience. Once you have accumulated at least one year of experience, submit an experience form and, if approved, your grade level will be upgraded.

***Why am I not a certified wastewater operator - I passed a subclass exam.*** You need to pass BOTH a General and a subclass exam to become certified. This applies to wastewater operators seeking certification in subclasses A through J. There is no requirement to take a general exam for subclasses K & L.

***When should I send in my Operator Certification Experience Form?*** Whenever you have one year of experience that has not been credited to your record, complete the experience form and return it to your regional coordinator. Experience forms are available on the Operator Certification Forms page <http://dnr.wi.gov> – keywords “Operator Certification”, or you may contact your regional coordinator for a form.

***How do I get an exam application?*** An exam application will be sent (2 1/2 months prior to the upcoming exam date) to those operators that have taken an exam in the last year and a half. An operator who has not taken an exam in the last year and a half, may contact their regional coordinator for an application. New operators may download an application from the forms page at <http://dnr.wi.gov> – keywords “Operator Certification”, or contact their regional coordinator

***Do you have any materials to help me study for exams? (Where do I get a study guide?)*** Study guides are available online at <http://dnr.wi.gov> – keywords “Operator Certification”. You may request a hard copy from your regional coordinator.

***When will I be notified if I pass/fail an exam?*** About three weeks after the exam date you will receive exam results in the mail. A list of missed objectives is printed out on your exam results letter. Refer to your study guide objectives to determine what areas of the exam gave you problems. If you pass the exam(s) you took, you will also receive the appropriate certificate.

***Why didn't you send me a renewal notice?*** We send renewal notices 6 weeks prior to the renewal date to the address we have on file. Maybe we don't have your current address? Check with your regional coordinator to see if we have your current address.

***When should I submit my Continuing Education Slips (CEC's)?*** Keep your CEC's and other documentation on file. Courtesy renewal reminder letters are mailed six weeks prior to your expiration date, provided that we have a current address for you on file. At that time, mail in your reminder letter, credits, and the appropriate fee before the expiration date on your certificate.

***What if I earn more Continuing Education credits than I need within my three year renewal period?*** That's great!! Send along any extra CEC's you have and they become a part of your record. CEC's cannot be carried over to the next renewal period.

***What do I do if I don't have enough CEC's to renew my certificate and my certification expires?*** Send in the required Continuing Education Slips when you have accumulated enough credits and a \$70 fee (\$45 renewal fee and \$25 penalty fee) to the department to get your certification renewed. You have one year after the expiration of your certificate to renew. If you do not renew your certification within that one year period your operator record will be deleted and you will have to retake all exams.

***What classes can I take to earn CEC's?*** For a current list of training events, view the training calendar on the DNR website <http://dnr.wi.gov> – keywords “*Operator Certification*”. Contact the training provider directly to register for an event. The annual “Certified Operator” also lists upcoming training events.

***When is the "Certified Operator" published? What is it?*** The "Certified Operator" is the annual newsletter of the operator certification program that informs of updates to the program and upcoming training events. It is sent to all certified operators every August.



Regional Office	Coordinator	Counties
North Eastern Region 2984 Shawano Ave Green Bay, WI 54313-6727	Dick Sachs (920) 662-5176 <a href="mailto:Richard.Sachs@wisconsin.gov">Richard.Sachs@wisconsin.gov</a>	Brown, Calumet, Door, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Kewaunee, Manitowoc, Marinette, Marquette, Menomonie, Oconto, Outagamie, Shawano, Waupaca, Waushara, Winnebago
West Central Region 890 Spruce St Baldwin, WI 54002	Waterworks Questions: Jan Engel (715) 684-2914 Ext. 140 <a href="mailto:Janice.Engel@wisconsin.gov">Janice.Engel@wisconsin.gov</a>  Wastewater Questions: Contact Statewide Coordinator	Adams, Buffalo, Chippewa, Clark, Crawford, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson, Juneau, LaCrosse, Marathon, Monroe, Pepin, Pierce, Portage, St. Croix, Trempealeau, Vernon, Wood
Northern Region 107 Sutliff Avenue Rhineland, WI 54501	Bonnie Kotila (715) 365-8907 <a href="mailto:Bonita.Kotila@wisconsin.gov">Bonita.Kotila@wisconsin.gov</a>	Ashland, Barron, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Florence, Forest, Iron, Langlade, Lincoln, Oneida, Polk, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Taylor, Vilas, Washburn
South Central Region	Contact Statewide Coordinator	Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Grant, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Lafayette, Richland, Rock, Sauk
South Eastern Region	Contact Statewide Coordinator	Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Sheboygan, Walworth, Washington, Waukesha
<p style="text-align: center;">Lisa Bushby, Statewide Operator Certification Coordinator Phone: (608) 266-0498 <a href="mailto:Lisa.Bushby@Wisconsin.gov">Lisa.Bushby@Wisconsin.gov</a> WI DNR Operator Certification Program, PO Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707-7921</p> <p style="text-align: center;">General questions can also be directed to <a href="mailto:DNROpCert@Wisconsin.gov">DNROpCert@Wisconsin.gov</a></p>		